

christianity Versus Isolationism



Thrust Statement: God's wants His people to work together through His company of redeemed ones.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17—6:1

The Church: God's Instrument of Outreach

It is not uncommon for individuals to think that God authorizes them to live their lives in isolation from other Christians. Many do not see the need of identifying with a local body of believers. This study will focus on the reason(s) for God's desire that His people identify with His community of redeemed ones. One question that every believer must cope with is: why has God saved me? Another question that every believer should inquire into is: is the church important in the scheme of God's redemptive plan? Why should I meet with God's people? Why should I evangelize? Why should I encourage other Christians to be faithful in their service to the Creator of heaven and earth? Have you presented yourself as a living sacrifice to the cause of Christ?

Paul sets forth the major reason as to why one should present his or her body as a living sacrifice to God. As one reflects upon a "living sacrifice," one should also consider the question: Why has God saved me? It is in this regard that Paul stresses the "why" of salvation (**Ephesians 1:12**). In summary of the "why" of salvation, Paul goes right to the kernel of redemption: "In order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory" (**1:12**). Once more Paul says, as cited above, that since salvation is the "gift of God," one should never forget that "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (**2:10**). God's people are to be "completely humble and gentle" and "patient, bearing with one another in love" and making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**4:2-3**). Peter expresses the "why" of salvation this way:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now

you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (**1 Peter 2:9-10**).

In view of the fact that we are a part of the chosen people, one must work within this framework. The terms that Peter employs to describe the Christian fellowship indicate togetherness, not separateness. The church is described as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people belonging to God.” Every Christian is a priest of God, both men and women. As a priest each Christian belongs to the Christian church. Those who responded to the Good News of God on the Day of Pentecost were added to the body of believers (**Acts 2:47**). In other words, the Lord added the ones being saved from day to day “together.” Again, one reads of togetherness in this same chapter: “And all that believed were together, and had all things common” (KJV, **2:45**). Did these believers live their lives in isolation from other believers? No! Listen once more to Luke as he describes the reaction of those who accepted Jesus:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (**2:46-47**).

When one is a part of the new community of God, one now presents his or her body as a living sacrifice to God in order that this sacrifice of commitment might bring praise to the One who raised him or her from the dead. The word priest, especially under the Old Testament, conjures up in every one’s mind the offering of animal sacrifices. Under the Old Covenant, individuals brought animals for sacrifices as their offerings (worship) to God. But under the New Covenant, Christians make their work an offering to God. In other words, everything the believer does is done for God’s glory. Even the most menial task is done to glorify God. All Christians meet together as a collective body of believers in order to encourage other Christians to faithfulness in their daily walk with God. Christians come together because they are already worshipers of the One True God. Every Christian makes his worship an offering to God.

Every Christian makes himself or herself an offering to God through presenting his or her own body to glorify God. Paul says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual^a act of worship” (**Romans 12:1**). What God desires of every follower of Christ is a heart of love and a life of service in God’s kingdom. If one wishes to communicate the love of God, one of the best ways is through one’s life, not just through words. It is in this vein that Jesus says:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

Every person is called to be an obedient child of God. One and all are chosen to do what God likes, not what he or she likes. Each one is selected for service of

consecration to kingdom work. Since every Christian is a priest, he or she must present his or her work to God as his or her spiritual act of worship. Are you conscious that you are a part of God's chosen people? Are you mindful that you are a priest of God? Are you aware that you are to be holy? The Christian community, according to the words of Peter, constitutes a "holy people." What does this mean to you? Someone who is holy (ἅγιος, Hagios, "sacred") is separated from sin and consecrated to God. One who is holy is different. Are you unlike the world? God has chosen his people to be distinct in their behavior from the behavior of the world of darkness. God has elected His children to be poles apart from other men and women in their daily walk with Him. What is the difference? Well, one can say that the difference lies in one's outlook on life. For the believer, his or her life is dedicated to God's will and to God's service. Every believer is a partner of the Living God. One should never forget that within the community of God that all are performers, not simply auditors or observers.

The church today, simply pays lip service to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Every Christian group is a commando group. God expects His people to penetrate the world of darkness for His glory and His honor. Many Christians are totally lost to the concept of saltiness to the world of corruption. Christians must refuse to sit down complacently under the pressures of the society in its rebellion against God's Law. The Gospel of Christ compels everyone who responds to the Good News of salvation by grace to be different from other people. No Christian can be just ordinary, for every believer is of God. Paul, in dealing with sin among the Corinthians, had to remind the saints that their bodies did not belong to themselves, but to God:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (**1 Corinthians 6:18-20**).

Because Christians are a part of the living Body of Christ, they are to proclaim God's way of salvation to a lost and dying world. The church of Jesus is identified as the company of the converted. The church sees all things in the context of Christ. As one reflects upon the death and resurrection of Christ, one gives a new context to one's involvement in the Christian society. Peter calls attention to the "spiritual house" that everyone born of God is a part of. Listen to Peter as he seeks to call attention to the activities of God's chosen people:

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (**1 Peter 2:4-5**).

Every Christian is a living stone, and the church (community) is a living structure into which everyone is built, or added (**Acts 2:41**). Many believers today think that they can live in isolation from other believers, but this is not the biblical way. Christianity is community. It is involvement; it is belonging. Every man and woman only find their true place in life when they become a part of this living edifice of God, which is the Body of

Christ. Solitary religion, as advanced by some, is ruled out by God. William Barclay is correct when he writes: “Individualistic Christianity is an absurdity; Christianity is community within the fellowship of the Church.”^[1] Why did the author of Hebrews warn believers not to abandon the assembling of themselves together if it is not important (**Hebrews 10:25**). This passage, along with **Acts 20:25-28**, emphasizes the church in God’s scheme of redemption. Listen to Paul as he addresses the overseers from Ephesus:

Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.^a Be shepherds of the church of God,^b which he bought with his own blood (**Acts 20:25-28**).

Christians are to wage war against the forces of evil. Since God is the One who initiated salvation for a lost world through grace, then this grace should turn everyone into a fighting machine for the cause of Christ. Christians are to evangelize and to live pure lives in the presence of all. As one reflects upon God’s grace, one immediately is confronted with the “how” of salvation. The “how” of salvation is an act of God “in” and “through” Jesus. Once an individual is put in a right relationship with God through faith, then the question arises: Why has God saved me? Has God saved you to be a hermit? Are you involved in kingdom work? One can say that the “why” of salvation is to glorify God through service within the spiritual house of God. Today, the theme of “Onward Christians Soldiers” is alien to the experience of many Christian churches. In the community that Jesus founded, there are no mere observers or auditors; but rather, all believers are involved in ministry. Christians need to see themselves as a task force to win the world to the Messiah. To rephrase the words of Peter, one can say that God called us into His service in order that we might become a fellowship of penetration. The meeting place of Christians should be a launching pad where Christians are propelled, as it were, to go out into the world to tell people, not who we are, but rather to whom we belong. Unfortunately today, many Christian churches place their loyalty to Christ upon their own unique, or odd, teaching of theology rather than loyalty to fulfillment of the Great Commission.

In the present day, the traditional gathering of the saints is a throwback to the Temple. The assembly nowadays is overemphasized as a worship service rather than as an assembly to push forward the strategy of winning souls to Christ and strengthening the saints. The church is the “company of the redeemed.” The early church did not seek God’s will in individual isolation. One cannot understand the idea of “company” without the concept of involvement. Elton Trueblood drives home this point when he writes: “The only purpose of a company is campaign.”^[2] Christians need to be actively engaged in finding out ways to get fellow believers on the production line of working for the kingdom of God. As one works out his or her salvation with fear and trembling, one must never forget that what one is doing day by day is in partnership with God. Sunday school teachers who are teaching small children and teenagers should employ this time to instill into their hearts a love for God and a desire to witness about Jesus as the Savior of the world.

When one is converted, one is in the army of God (**Ephesians 6:10; 2 Timothy 2:3-4**). God has called every believer to evangelize. Evangelism is not the profession of the so-called clergy, which is a throwback to Catholicism with its selected priests. The Christian Church, as a whole, does not use the word *priest* for its ordained, but the word *clergy*. Jesus told the disciples in **Luke 24** to bear testimony to the truth of His resurrection from the dead. Evangelism is simply the method of testimony—testimony about who Jesus is. When one is converted to Christ, one is called to be a witness about Jesus and His redemption made available through faith. The church is to be a fellowship of witnesses. In other words, the church was formed by Christ to accomplish His mission of evangelizing the world. It is in the regard that Paul writes:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^a for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

In order to reach out to people, there is a sense in which every Christian will have to travel light. Christians must be willing to sacrifice a certain amount of their freedom in order to witness for Jesus. It is not uncommon for many Christians to take Christianity too lightly. Do you see yourself as a taskforce for the advancement of God's kingdom? Do we think that Christianity is just sitting comfortably in pews and listening to the preacher and the special singers? Are you a soldier of the Cross? When Paul was incarcerated in Rome, he wrote a letter to the Philippians in which he spoke of Epaphroditus as a fellow soldier: "But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs" (**Philippians 2:25**). In Paul's last letter to Timothy, he encouraged him to: "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (**2 Timothy 2:3**). Once more, Paul, in his letter to Philemon, writes: "To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, ² to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home" (**Philemon 2**).

Are we soldiers of the Cross of Jesus? Can we sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" with meaning? If we as a fellowship are not advancing, we are already retreating in our spiritual journey. Are you committed to the cause of Christ? One must bear in mind that commitment is never real unless it leads to evangelism; Christianity must move forward. If one wishes true commitment to Jesus, one must always be conscious that commitment to the cause of Christ will never be effective apart from a fellowship of committed Christians. Do you believe in Christianity? If so, then you will place yourself at the disposal of Jesus Christ for the work He has called you to do. Mere belief, said James, is never enough (**James 2:19**).

What does Christianity mean to you? What does the church mean to you? Are you a part of the company of the redeemed? Are you working within the local body of

believers for the advancement of God's kingdom upon earth? As you reflect upon your conversion, you should pray that God will help you know that conversion is not only an initial act, but that it is also a growing experience. God does not want His people to drift into spiritual idleness. He detests lukewarmness in His people (**Revelation 3:14-21**). When Jesus wrote to the seven churches in Asia Minor, he addressed each letter to the congregation. Do you have a spiritual history in your pilgrimage of faith? Or are you where you were twenty years ago? Many Christians are the same today at the age of seventy as they were at the age of twenty. As one reflects upon the how and why of salvation, one discovers that the words of Peter reinforces the *how* and *why* of salvation:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (**1 Peter 2:9-12**).

a Or *reasonable*

^[1] William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 196.

a Traditionally *bishops*

b Many manuscripts *of the Lord*

^[2] Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 37.

a Or *be a sin offering*